

The Unfairness of It All

In the chapter titled "The Unfairness of It All," the narrative focuses on James Buchanan's sentiments surrounding Lincoln's election and the turmoil facing his presidency. Buchanan, who became president in 1857, yearned for unity and peace, expressing frustration that he might not be able to complete his term without unrest. He had hoped to restore harmony among the states during his presidency but was confronted with escalating tensions, particularly regarding the debate over slavery in Kansas. This crisis of whether Kansas would enter the Union as a free or slave state overshadowed his moderate view that such issues were of little consequence, leaving it to the Supreme Court for resolution.

The chapter highlights Buchanan's connection to the infamous Dred Scott decision delivered by Chief Justice Roger B. Taney just two days after his inauguration. Taney's ruling not only declared that Blacks could not be citizens but also affirmed that Congress had no authority to restrict slavery in the territories. While Buchanan publicly supported the court's ruling, he had clandestinely influenced its deliberations and was aware of its implications prior to his inauguration. He considered slavery a "moral evil," yet he did not oppose its existence in the South and instead blamed abolitionists for inflaming tensions.

As his presidency drew to a close, Buchanan faced the daunting task of writing his final annual message to Congress. He recognized this address, set to be delivered on December 3, as a pivotal moment that could shape his legacy. He hoped for a peaceful transition before Lincoln assumed the presidency, fearing for the nation's stability amidst rising tensions. The chapter concludes with Buchanan preparing to articulate his vision of leadership during a critical time, as the countdown to inauguration day began and the specter of civil upheaval loomed over the nation.